



The Commission on
Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity
CWCSEO
Connecticut General Assembly

**Testimony of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity
Presented to the Housing Committee
Tuesday, February 28, 2023, at 11:00 AM in Room 1A of the LOB and Zoom and YouTube Live**

In Support of SB No. 004

Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, ranking members, and all other distinguished members of the Housing Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA). The *Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity* (CWCSEO) is submitting testimony in support of SB No. 004, "An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs." My name is Melvette Hill, Parent Leadership & Family Engagement Director at CWCSEO.

"Affordable, accessible housing and fair housing practices for residents and families are important issues" and we support our leaders in designing policy that shows innovation and fiscal responsibility as Connecticut continues to make strides addressing Connecticut's affordable housing shortage. We support solutions that ensure that families who rent have stable, safe and affordable housing to raise their families, and that families have protections in place that support their upward mobility, agency and dignity. Housing insecurity is directly related to wealth inequality and is not only an economic justice issue — it's also an issue of racial, gender, and health and human rights.

SB No. 4 "An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs." (LCO No. 4702)

SB 4 aims at promoting fair and equitable housing protections to renters facing astronomical rising rents amid a larger housing crisis impacting working families already on the brink of evictions and potential homelessness. SB 4, therefore, would cap the rent to a fix low percentage, prohibit exuberant rent increases during public health emergencies and would prohibit evictions in winter unless mandated by the courts. Moreover, SB 4 would promote a brand-new workforce housing opportunity program with tax incentives for construction of or rehabilitation of affordable housing, enhanced mortgage assistance programs and a new well-funded pilot program which would provide temporary housing for families experiencing homelessness and veterans who need respite care among others benefits.

Substitute SB No. 4 "An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs" (LCO No. 5025)

This substitute language proposal offers some solutions supportive of tenants by alleviating certain pressures and asserting the rights of tenants including forbidding landlords from charging processing and applications fees to potential tenants and requiring landlords to provide prospective tenant(s) a copy of their screening report and receipt of payment for the screening prior to collection of said fees. It also makes provision for the Commissioner of Housing to develop standardized rental agreement forms for use by landlords and tenants written in language that is easy to read and comprehend while defining key terms in both English and Spanish.



Equally important is the charge for the Commissioner of Housing to establish a pilot program to provide temporary housing to persons experiencing homelessness (those without housing, unhoused) and/or veterans who need respite care.

Notably needed and identified in the proposal is the establishment of a task force to study the potential growth of affordable housing in the State through the conversion of underutilized commercial and retail properties into affordable housing units.

Housing Policy Analysis

All in all, the Commission is in support of the original Committee Raised SB 4 (LCO No. 4702) with a friendly amendment that we would recommend include a rent cap of no more than 3%, rather than the 4% plus Consumer Price Index as currently written in SB 4.

The Commission is also supportive of some concepts written in the substitute language to SB No. 4 especially those mentioned above on page 1. What is missing from the proposed substitute language and would help tenants who may need to make life decisions based on their inability to afford imposed rent increases are: requirements to provide a minimum number of days by which a landlord notifies their tenants of rent increases, establishing limitations on the amount by which a landlord can increase a tenant's rent and setting limits on the frequency by which landlords can increase rent. Statewide, rents have increased by 24% since 2017. More than 114,000 renter households spend more than half of their income on housing costs. And nearly all renters spending more than half of their household income on housing costs earn less than \$50,000.¹

From June 2020 to June 2022, in Connecticut "many communities saw rents increase by double-digit percentages. Of the 157 ZIP codes analyzed [by CoStar, a real estate information and analytics company], 74 zip codes saw rent prices jump by at least 10 percent, including 10 ZIP codes that saw rents spike by more than 30 percent."²

Working families struggle to live, yet alone thrive in a State where they experience a 10% to 30% rent increase with little notice.

The Commission would highly recommend the following:

- 1) **Inclusion of People With Lived Experience** - In proposed Substitute Bill No. 4, Section 19 – Add two additional persons to the task force who are people with lived experience of homelessness or extended experience of being unhoused. "Lived experience refers to 'representation and understanding of an individual's human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge' based on one's own life. People with lived experience

¹ Partnership for Strong Communities: https://www.pschousing.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/PSC_RAP_Fact_Sheet_02_07_23.pdf

² How the cost of rent changed in Connecticut during the COVID-19 pandemic, <https://www.ctinsider.com/projects/2022/ct-rent-tracker/>



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are those directly affected by social, health, public health, or other issues and the strategies that aim to address those issues. This gives them insights that can inform and improve systems, research, policies, practices, and programs.”³

- 2) State [and Federal] agencies can work with people with lived experience to develop a deeper understanding of the conditions affecting certain populations, the solutions that are most appropriate for those impacted by the issue, and the potential harmful unintended consequences of the current and past actions taken by the existing system on the people it aims to serve.
- 3) **Rent Regulation/Stabilization** – include limits on the frequency by which a landlord can increase a tenant’s rent and limits on the amount landlords can increase a tenant’s rent⁴ as mentioned on the original bill; prohibit large and sudden spikes or price gouging.

In the short and long term, CWCSEO wants to support the Housing committee as they strategize equitable initiatives that support tenant rights, home ownership, and programs that keep children and their families at the center of policy and systems change and that work to lift families to positions of thriving and driving the economy in Connecticut.

CWCSEO, is a non-partisan agency within the legislative branch of government. We work to eliminate disparities by identifying opportunities, building connections, and promoting change. Most importantly, we serve the legislature and the people of the state by promoting best practices and driving sound public policy via data driven research, recommendations, and a cross-cultural approach to policy innovation.

Testimony prepared by Melvette Hill, Parent Leadership & Family Engagement Director and Werner Oyanadel, Latino and Puerto Rican Policy Director at CWCSEO.

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³ US Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation (APSE) <https://aspe.hhs.gov/lived-experience>

⁴ In 2019, Oregon limited annual rent increases on many rental homes more than 15 years old to 7% plus the consumer price index (CPI) measure of inflation; In 2021, St. Paul, Minnesota voters passed stringent rent control to take effect on May 1, 2022. The ordinance limits annual rent increases to 3% and applies to most rental housing. (2022 NLIHC Advocates Guide)